



How to Handle Biting

The toddler years are a time of growth, exploration and change for children. Often toddlers have trouble expressing their thoughts and feelings and may act out by biting others.

Why Do Toddlers Bite?

- **Physical and developmental changes.** Toddlers are teething, they love to explore and experiment (with their mouths), and they may bite to get a reaction.
- **Expressing Feelings.** Biting may be a way to express frustration, anger, excitement, anxiety or a need for attention.
- **Environment not the right fit for child.** Is there too much stimulation or not enough? Is the schedule too rigid or so loose that they don't know what their day will be like? Is the play area too crowded?

What To Do When Toddlers Bite:

- Quickly comfort the child who was bitten, then be clear and firm with the child who bit that biting is not OK.
- Give first aid if needed. If skin is broken, wash wound with soap and water; if child is likely to get dirt in wound, cover it. Offer an ice pack to reduce pain and swelling whether the skin is broken or not.

Handling Ongoing Biting Behavior:

- Try to find out why the biter is biting by observing where and when it happens.
- Talk with all caregivers to develop a plan to handle future biting. Make changes to the environment and or routine if you think it is encouraging the biting.

How to Prevent Biting:

- Provide a positive and well-supervised environment: have duplicate toys, provide safe objects for teething, create different areas for smaller groups of children to play in.
- Provide a flexible yet consistent schedule.
- Provide a variety of sensory activities: painting, playdough, sand and water play, and interactive toys.
- Interact with children gently and thoughtfully.
- Have realistic expectations for children's behavior.

Adapted from *No Biting: Policy and Practice for Toddler Programs* by Gretchen Kinnell (2002). Copies available from the NH Childcare Resource and Referral Network: www.nhccrc.org or through the Family Resource Connection (NH State Library) at 1-800-298-4321, www.nh.gov.nhsl/frc



For fact sheets go to: www.chadkids.org/goto/childhealthmonth

9/2007

Children's Hospital at Dartmouth, Injury Prevention Center, NH Department of Health and Human Services, NH Department of Education, NH Pediatric Society, NH SAFE KIDS & Partnership for a Drug Free NH